



Warfield Elementary School

15261 SW 150th Street

Indiantown, FL 34956

Principal: Loreen Francescani

Warfield Elementary School serves grades K–4 and is located in Indiantown, Florida. It was selected as a national Blue Ribbon School in 2006 and is led by Loreen Francescani, Florida’s 2006 Outstanding Elementary School Principal. By any measure, Warfield is a successful school that provides an exceptional education for

all of its students. Yet the school faces many challenges. It is located in a rural area, where it is difficult to attract staff. Its high-poverty school population (96% free and reduced-price lunch) is an anomaly within the relatively affluent Martin County School District. Seventy-one percent of the students are English language learners, largely of Guatemalan descent, who speak either Spanish or an Amerindian dialect that may have no written language. Some students enter Warfield in later elementary grades speaking no English and with no literacy skills in their native language.

- ◆ Elementary (K–4)
- ◆ 75% Hispanic
- ◆ 17% Black
- ◆ 5% White
- ◆ 67% Limited English Proficient
- ◆ 96% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

Warfield’s story is a testament to high expectations, data-driven continuous improvement, and research-based reading instructional strategies, because it has not always been a successful school. In 1999, Warfield’s record of poor performance led to mandatory restructuring. The school district required all personnel to reapply for their jobs, and show commitment to the belief that **all** students can learn. To bolster staff capacity, the school district paid hiring incentives and provided 10 extra days of staff development the first year and five extra days for the next two years. Warfield has kept class size small—no more than 20 students in a class, and frequently fewer. And, with both a reading coach and a writing/math coach, there is plenty of on-site support for teachers.

As a result of these changes, Warfield has met criteria for AYP in all subgroups as set by the state of Florida for No Child Left Behind. The proficiency percentage in 4th grade reading changed from 31% proficient in 2001–2002 to 66% proficient in



2004–2005. In mathematics, proficiency rates during the same period increased from 32% to 75%.

Early in their change initiative, Warfield adopted a literacy-focused improvement process. This process, with its accompanying assessments, is still a cornerstone of Warfield's reading instruction, along with a core textbook series. Reading instruction at Warfield focuses on the five components of reading: phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. All students receive a minimum of 90 minutes of uninterrupted reading instruction daily, including whole-group and small-group differentiated instruction. The reading coach is available to model lessons and provide other instructional support for teachers. Warfield also places a great deal of emphasis on student development in writing—with good student results—incorporating a daily block of writing instruction, regular assessment of progress in learning writing skills, and support for teachers from the writing coach.

The reading program is organized for Warfield teachers in a Reading Calendar at each grade level that specifies what should be taught each week of the school year and when assessments should be given. The school uses a combination of assessments. Each assessment is given several times over the course of the school year so that student progress can be tracked and additional help provided when needed. Teachers administer the reading assessments, and the reading coach enters data into classroom profiles. Other standardized data are entered into district and state databases and reports that are accessible to teachers. The reading coach organizes staff development around data interpretation and ensures that a wide range of instructional resources is available for teachers to use in addressing student needs. Warfield teachers have become adept at using progress monitoring data to drive reading instruction. Once an assessment is given, teachers are eager for the results—and they typically get them within a day so that they can begin working with students.

Most additional teaching in reading is provided in the classroom. Thanks to the strong progress monitoring system, classroom teachers are usually able to quickly identify a struggling student and provide small-group or one-on-one assistance; if that is not sufficient, teachers consult with the reading coach, colleagues, and administrators to determine proper interventions. Warfield makes use of computer-assisted instruction to provide additional teaching in reading. One technology-based intervention is used both with younger readers who are



having difficulty with foundational reading skills, and older students who enter Warfield with no English and need to get up to speed quickly. This computer program provides self-paced practice in phonemic awareness and phonics skills that progress as students reach mastery. Or, teachers can program the software to provide targeted practice in a particular skill. For students in grades 3 and 4 who are low-performing in reading and for students in the school's Exceptional Student Education program, the school uses a variety of other computer-based programs that focus on different reading skills.

An example of Warfield's use of research-based instructional strategies is the vocabulary program, which is based on the research of Isabel Beck. Warfield first became aware of Beck's work by conducting online research into effective programs and consulting with the Florida Center for Reading Research. A voluntary staff study group formed to read Beck's work and figure out how to implement suggested strategies schoolwide. Later, Warfield adopted a structured program and materials based on Beck's research. At Warfield, strategies for vocabulary acquisition center around three tiers of words, per Beck's research:

- Tier 1 includes common everyday words;
- Tier 2 focuses on more descriptive, literate words; and
- Tier 3 consists of content vocabulary (for math, science, social studies, etc.).

"Before, we used a simpler language, because we knew there were concerns about the children and what they could understand. So people avoided using words like 'deceive,' 'serenade,' 'calamity,' and 'preposterous,' because they didn't feel the students were really capable of understanding those words," states principal Loreen Francescani. Now teachers feel confident using and teaching challenging words because of the support provided to the students around each word. Teachers introduce between two and seven Tier 2 words a week, and spend the week putting a special focus on those words using pictures, posters, antonyms and synonyms, and physical response activities, among other strategies. Students often receive a tally, ticket, or other incentive prize when they are overheard using one of the week's words in conversation or use one in their journal or in other content class assignments.

If Warfield's approach to teaching reading sounds like the basis of a good reading program for ALL students, that's because it is. What about the English language development needs of the group of English learners? Warfield weaves English-as-



a- second-language support into its overall instructional program in a tightly integrated fashion. For starters, per Florida law, all teachers who teach English learners must have an ESOL endorsement on their certificate. In addition, Warfield staff participated in training called “No English Learner Left Behind,” which focused on research-based strategies for this population. This means that all teachers at Warfield have a good understanding of how to effectively work with the linguistic and cultural differences that English learners bring to the classroom. Further, Warfield employs paraprofessionals who speak the native language of the school’s English learners. These staff members play a critical role in easing the transition into a U.S. school for students who enter with no English-speaking skills; they are available to work with English learners in small groups to clarify instruction and address particular student needs. Finally, Warfield makes good use of computer-assisted instruction to build English language skills.

Warfield’s support for students doesn’t stop at the end of the school day or at the end of the school year. An after-school reading and enrichment program is offered in partnership with the YWCA. Thanks to a 21st Century Community Learning Center grant, summer school is available to all students and, typically, about 500 of Warfield’s 620 students take advantage of this opportunity. According to writing and math coach Gail Tomer, the summer school program ensures that English learners “don’t have that long summer where they have no English at home and they’re losing quite a bit. This gives them another month where they have role models here, they have the language, and it has worked wonders at Warfield.”